

Guidebook of the California Clam Shell Scrip Currency of 1933

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

1 History of the California Clam Shell Scrip Currency.....	1
Origin of the Clam Shell Scrip in Crescent City.....	3
Origin of the Clam Shell Scrip in Pismo Beach.....	6
2 The Crescent City Clam Shell Scrip.....	3
Crescent City Clam Shell Scrip: Remaining Specimens.....	3
Crescent City Clam Shell Scrip: Recorded Specimens.....	6
3 The Pismo Beach Clam Shell Scrip.....	9
Pismo Beach Clam Shell Scrip: Remaining Specimens.....	9
Pismo Beach Clam Shell Scrip: Recorded Specimens.....	12
4 History of the 80th Anniversary. Series.....	19
Production and Issuance of the 80 th Anniversary.....	19
80 th Anniversary Series Specimens.....	22

Bibliography

1 History of the California Clam Shell Scrip

During the early years of the Great Depression many Americans had lost all confidence in the US banking system as the Wall Street crash forced many financial institutions into bankruptcy, taking with them their client's savings. Due to this loss of confidence, many Americans would withdraw their savings from unstable banks in preference of the proverbial "money under the bed", leading to the infamous bank runs of the early 1930s. These continuous runs would lead to the Bank Holiday of 1933, when access to all financial institutions was denied in order to allow Congress time to take restorative action.

However, for American business owners, this meant an inability to operate as they were denied access to the bloodline of business: cash. Without small cash local businesses throughout the United States had no payment option for customers, as credit had long lost its appeal. This need for a reliable medium of exchange led many businesses, cities, civil services and even chambers of commerce to rewind the clock by adopting scrip currency – a substitute for legal tender, often issued as credit in the form of paper currency or tokens – as the new medium of exchange. These scrip currencies would appear in the form of paper bills to wooden coins across almost every state in the union. Unsurprisingly, many businesses and cities chose to adopt a modern paper scrip in varying rectangular shapes much like the U.S. Dollar. However, on the Western seaboard of California, local residence would adopt a far more unique scrip currency: The Clam. The California Clam Shell Scrip of 1933 is one of the most unique forms of scrip currency to arise during the Great Depression. Originating in Crescent City and Pismo

Beach almost simultaneously during the Bank Holiday of 1933, this scrip currency was produced by local merchants to combat the lack of cash available during the U.S. financial intuitions' hiatus. Using paste and paper or handwritten inscriptions, seven Crescent City merchants, including the Chamber of Commerce issued over \$1,000 worth of Clam Shell Scrip during the Bank Holiday of 1933. Father south no fewer than twelve businesses and organizations in Pismo Beach used the local Pismo Clams as their new medium of exchange by writing denominations, dates or "In God We Trust" on the polished outside of the shell.

Origin of the Clam Shell Scrip in Crescent City

During the first week of March 1933 Crescent City Chamber of Commerce Secretary L.G. Westfall suggested the idea to use clam shells as a medium of exchange. L.G. Westfall cited a Pennsylvania banker who had written about early California settlers using clam shells as a medium of exchange when they first arrived in the region. His idea gained popularity and resulted in the Chamber of Commerce issuing vast amounts of clam shell scrip. In the following days Crescent City merchants chose to adopt L.G. Westfall's idea and issue scrip currency of their own. Much of the Crescent City scrip came to be used by local ranchers, who were paid for their produce and other goods with the shells.¹

Origin of the Clam Shell Scrip in Pismo Beach

On Monday March 6th, 1933 local merchant and owner of Hi-Way Cigar William H. Bogue visited neighboring merchant K. L. Phillips to ask if he had a roll of nickels as all

¹ Ralph A. Mitchell and Charles V. Kappan, "United States Depression Scrip," *Calcoin News* 12, no. 6 (1958): 134-135, accessed January 3, 2020. https://archive.org/details/calcoinnews12n0cali_t6w7/page/134

banks in the city were closed. Unfortunately, Phillips had no cash nor change to spare and as the two men were talking Philips jokingly suggested that until the banks reopened, they could always use clam shell's as money. Inspired by this Bogue later visited Harry H. Leiter who owned Leiter's Pharmacy. Together the two men set about creating a \$1 Clam Shell Scrip using the shell of a Pismo Clam. Bogue then took their newly create Clam Shell Scrip to show Phillips, who signed it and placed it in his service station's window. That same day, a customer saw the clam shell and purchased it from Phillips for the \$1 face value. Upon learning that their Clam Shell Scrip had actually been purchased for the \$1 face value, Leiter decided to take Phillips idea more seriously and started to produce the Clam Shell Scrip en-masse with the aid of four unemployed Pismo Beach residents. The idea quickly spread to other merchants who saw an opportunity to make light of the town's difficult situation. The actions of Bogue, Leiter and Phillips was the catalyst that resulted in a dozen merchants issuing the scrip currency that would become known as California's Clam Shell Scrip of 1933.²

² Ralph A. Mitchell and Charles V. Kappan, "United States Depression Scrip," *Calcoin News* 13, no. 3 (1959): 65, accessed January 3, 2020. <https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/book/516388?page=7>

2 The Crescent City Clam Shell Scrip

Crescent City's Clam Shell Scrip followed a common design with two variations. All Clam Shell Scrip was inscribed on the soft inside of the clam shell. This was accomplished either through writing out the inscription in blue, red or black ink or by typing out the inscription on a small piece of paper that was then pasted to the interior of the shell. Denominations were consistent across issuers at \$0.10 and \$0.25, with a few issued at \$0.50 and \$0.05 values. Apart from denomination, date and issuer, it was common for inscriptions to include an expiration date and where the Clam Shell Scrip could be redeemed. Although the final amount issued is unknown, some claims estimate the total value of the Clam Shell Scrip to be over \$1,000 between the seven participating establishments.

Crescent City Clam Shell Scrip: Remaining Specimens

 No Image	Issuer: Alakachik Date: 10.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.10 Serial Number: No # Signed By: H.R. Adist, C.W. Nohl Proof of Existence: Photograph, Holabird-Kagin Americana Western States Token Auction 2012
 No Image	Issuer: Bruce W. Gause Insurance Date: 07.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.05 Serial Number: No # Signed By: Bruce Gause Proof of Existence: Photograph, Holabird-Kagin Americana Western States Token Auction 2012
 No Image	Issuer: Bruce W. Gause Insurance Date: Unknown Denomination: \$0.10 Serial Number: No # Signed By: Bruce Gause Proof of Existence: Photograph, Depressionscrip.com
 No Image	Issuer: Crescent City Chamber of Commerce Date: Unknown Denomination: \$0.10 Serial Number: No # Signed By: Unknown Proof of Existence: Photograph, Depressionscrip.com

Crescent City Clam Shell Scrip: Recorded Specimens

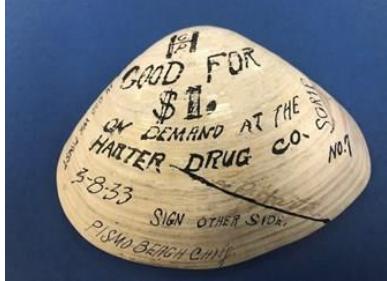
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Cleanatorium, The Odorless Cleaners Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: No # Signed By: A.L. Hawkins Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 12, No. 6 (1958)</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Crescent City Chamber of Commerce Date: 03.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.10, \$0.25 Serial Number: No # or Series B Signed By: Unknown Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 12, No. 6 (1958)</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Electric Shop Date: 10.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: No # Signed By: M. Nielsen Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 12, No. 6 (1958)</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Public Utilities Office Date: 09.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.10 Serial Number: No # Signed By: A.B. Bower Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 12, No. 6 (1958)</p>

3 The Pismo Beach Clam Shell Scrip

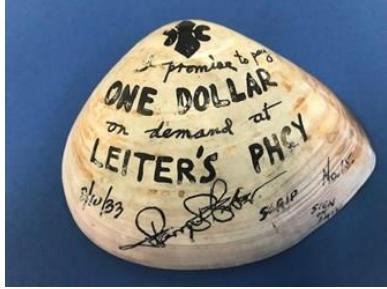
The design of each piece follows a similar format with variations for font, artistic style and colour. Pismo Beach Clam Shell Scrip was inscribed with writing and designs on the polished outside shell of a Pismo Clam. Inscription is solely limited to writing placed directly on the polished shell. All Clam Shell Scrip bares a denomination, date of issue, signature of merchant and name of issuing establishment where it could be redeemed. Other phrasing can vary from merchant to merchant. However, common phrases include; “Good for denomination on Demand at issuing merchant.”, “In God We Trust” and “Endorse on Back”. The latter of these refers to how many merchants required users to sign the soft inside of each Clam Shell Scrip before redeeming. Some Clam Shell Scrip show multiple endorsements, suggesting that it was not uncommon for the scrip to be used multiple times. Finally, many Clam Shell Scrip were inscribed with a symbol on the Umbo, or hinge joint, of the clam shell.

Pismo Beach Clam Shell Scrip: Remaining Specimens

	<p>Issuer: Beach Camp Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: No # Signed By: Theodore Bernhoeft Proof of Existence: Physical, National Numismatic Collection, Smithsonian</p>
	<p>Issuer: California Market Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: 8 Signed By: C.F. Earman, W.M. Houser Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: California Market Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: 4 Signed By: C.F. Earman, W.M. Houser Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: Chamber of Commerce Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: No # Signed By: Theodore Bernthoeft, Harry H. Leiter, William Vutunois Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>

	<p>Issuer: F.W. Wolverton Signs Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$20.00 Serial Number: 2 Signed By: F.W. Wolverton Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: Harter Drug Co. Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: 9 Signed By: C.P. Harter Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Harter Drug Co. Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: 5 Signed By: C.P. Harter Proof of Existence: Physical, National Numismatic Collection, Smithsonian</p>
	<p>Issuer: Harter Drug Co. Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: 7 Signed By: C.P. Harter Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>

	<p>Issuer: Henderson's Drug Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: 12 Signed By: O.L. Henderson Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: Henderson's Drug Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: 14 Signed By: O.L. Henderson Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: Henderson's Drug Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: 18 Signed By: O.L. Henderson Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: Hi-way Cigar Store Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: 12 Signed By: William H. Bogue Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>

	<p>Issuer: Hi-way Cigar Store Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: 10 Signed By: William H. Bogue Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Leiter's Pharmacy Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: 8 Signed By: Harry H. Leiter Proof of Existence: Physical, National Numismatic Collection, Smithsonian</p>
	<p>Issuer: Leiter's Pharmacy Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: 1 Signed By: Harry H. Leiter Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: Leiter's Pharmacy Date: 10.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: 15 Signed By: Harry H. Leiter Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>

	<p>Issuer: Leiter's Pharmacy Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$5.00 Serial Number: 69 Signed By: Harry H. Leiter Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: Pomeroy Electric Date: 10.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: 6 Signed By: H.C Stoll Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: Restwell Cabins Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: 4A Signed By: Charles V. Williamson Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Restwell Cabins Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: 5A Signed By: Charles V. Williamson Proof of Existence: Physical, National Numismatic Collection, Smithsonian</p>

 No Image	<p>Issuer: Restwell Cabins Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: Illegible (231) Signed By: Charles V. Williamson Proof of Existence: Physical, National Numismatic Collection, Smithsonian</p>
	<p>Issuer: The Beach Store Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: 20 Signed By: A.A. Erhart Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>
	<p>Issuer: The Beach Store Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: 39 Signed By: A.A. Erhart Proof of Existence: Physical, Pismo Beach City Hall Collection</p>

Pismo Beach Clam Shell Scrip: Recorded Specimens

 No Image	<p>Issuer: F.W. Wolverton Signs Date: Unknown Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: F.W. Wolverton Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: F.W. Wolverton Signs Date: Unknown Denomination: \$5.00 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: F.W. Wolverton Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Harter Drug Co. Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: C.P. Harter Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Hi-way Cigar Store Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: William H. Bogue Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)</p>

 No Image	Issuer: Leiter's Pharmacy Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: Harry H. Leiter Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)
 No Image	Issuer: Phillips (Tidewater) Associated Service Station Date: Unknown Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: K.L. Phillips Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)
 No Image	Issuer: Phillips (Tidewater) Associated Service Station Date: Unknown Denomination: \$0.50 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: K.L. Phillips Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)
 No Image	Issuer: Phillips (Tidewater) Associated Service Station Date: Unknown Denomination: \$1.00 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: K.L. Phillips Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)
 No Image	Issuer: Restwell Cabins Date: 08.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: Charles V. Williamson Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)

 No Image	<p>Issuer: The Beach Store Date: 06.03.1933 Denomination: \$0.25 Serial Number: Unknown Signed By: A.A. Erhart Record of Existence: Calcoin News Vol. 13, No. 3 (1959)</p>
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4 History of the 80th Anniversary Series

In the 21st Century Clam Shell Scrip has seen a resurgence in public use as a currency in Pismo Beach, CA, through the aspirations of a local numismatist and several Pismo Beach merchants. In 2013, on the 80th anniversary of the original 1933 Clam Shell Scrip currency, a replica series using Pismo Beach Clams were produced and issued. The Pismo Beach merchants offered the replica Clam Shell Scrip to customers either following a purchase or available for purchase to patrons as memorabilia. The first two establishments to offer replica Clam Shell Scrip to customers were The Girl's Restaurant, a casual dining restaurant, and Shell-ebration Beach House, a vacation rental. Another local merchant noticed the Clam Shell Scrip and, intrigued by the idea, requested that a batch be made for his store, Games Exchange. The 80th Anniversary Series was enjoyed by locals and tourists who often kept the replica Clam Shell Scrip as memorabilia, rather than redeem it at a later date. The 80th Anniversary Series is still accepted by participating merchants and despite production ceasing in 2013, there is optimism for a new series of replica Clam Shell Scrip in the future.³

Production and Issuance of the 80th Anniversary Series

The series started with two prototype Clam Shell Scrip, one for Shell-ebration Beach House dated May 19th, 2013 and one for The Girl's Restaurant which had no date inscribed on it. Both of these prototypes where designed and issued by the Pismo Beach numismatist. As more merchants decided to issue the replica scrip currency, production was outsourced to a designer to meet the increased scale of production. The hired designer created three different designs for each

³ Joel Anderson, Interview with series creator by author, September 15, 2019.; Games Exchange Owner, interview by author, September 15, 2019.

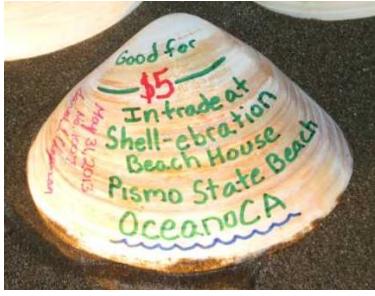
participating merchant, which were issued en-masse to the public. Much like the 1933 Clam Shell Scrip, these designs were drawn by hand and would often include aesthetic touches; palm trees, birds in flight or a beach.⁴

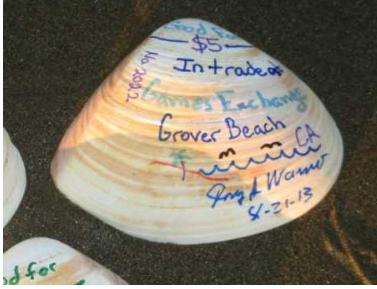
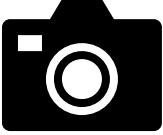
Apart from the two prototypes and the three public Clam Shell Scrip releases for the Pismo Beach merchants, the 80th Anniversary Series had two additional releases in late 2013. The first was a second batch of Shell-ebration Beach House Clam Shell Scrip with a denomination of \$5, offered for sale via mail-order. This issue garnered significant popularity with estimates of roughly 100 pieces sold, although no records remain as to the exact number. The second was a special edition Clam Shell Scrip for Shell-ebration Beach House with a denomination of \$2.50. This special edition was created at the bequest of a private organization to distribute as a party favor for the organization's holiday banquet. A total of 116 Clam Shell Scrip were produced for the event. The special edition was the last release of the 80th anniversary series, however, there is optimism regarding the creation of a new Clam Shell Scrip for Games Exchange. The series, if implemented, is planned to consist of Clam Shell Scrip with a \$20 denomination, offered as gift certificates for customers.

⁴ Joel Anderson, Interview with series creator by author, September 15, 2019.; Games Exchange Owner, interview by author, September 15, 2019.

80th Anniversary Series Specimens

For current information visit series author and numismatist J. Anderson's blog at:
pismoclammoney.com

 No Image	<p>Issuer: Shell-ebration Beach House Type: Pattern Designer: J. Anderson Date: 19.05.2013 Denomination: \$5.00 Serial Number: 001 Signed By: Unknown Proof of Existence: Physical, J. Anderson personal collection</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: The Girl's Restaurant Type: Pattern Designer: J. Anderson Date: Unknown, 2013 Denomination: \$5.00 Serial Number: 1001, 1002, 1003 Signed By: Unknown Record of Existence: Verbal, J. Anderson interview</p>
	<p>Issuer: Shell-ebration Beach House Type: Official Release Designer: Sarah Chapman Date: 03.05.2013 & 01.06.2013 Denomination: \$5.00 Serial Number: 1001-1025 Signed By: Sarah Chapman Record of Existence: Photograph, joelscoins.com</p>
	<p>Issuer: The Girl's Restaurant Type: Official Release Designer: Sarah Chapman Date: No date Denomination: \$5.00 Serial Number: 1004-1014 Signed By: Sarah Chapman Record of Existence: Photograph, joelscoins.com</p>

	<p>Issuer: The Games Exchange Type: Official Release Designer: Sarah Chapman Date: 21.08.2013 Denomination: \$5.00 Serial Number: 2001-2022 Signed By: T. Warino Record of Existence: Photograph, joelscoins.com</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Shell-ebration Beach House Type: 2nd Official Release Designer: Sarah Chapman Date: Unknown, 2013 Denomination: \$5.00 Serial Number: Unknown, ~100 issued Signed By: Sarah Chapman Proof of Existence: Verbal, J. Anderson interview</p>
 No Image	<p>Issuer: Shell-ebration Beach House Type: Special Edition Designer: Sarah Chapman Date: Unknown, 2013 Denomination: \$2.50 Serial Number: Unknown, 116 issued Signed By: Sarah Chapman Proof of Existence: Verbal, J. Anderson interview</p>

Bibliography:

Mitchell, Ralph A. and Kappan, Charles V. "United States Depression Scrip." *Calcoin News* 12, no. 6 (1958): 134-135. https://archive.org/details/calcoinnews12n0cali_t6w7/page/134

Mitchell, Ralph A. and Kappan Charles V. "United States Depression Scrip." *Calcoin News* 13, no. 3 (1959). <https://nnp.wustl.edu/library/book/516388?page=7>.